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COPEs WITH
'ASCOT'

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THE LATEST
NEW
COACHES

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COME WITH
US TO
KRAKOW!

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ALMEX GOES
WINDOWS
ROUTE

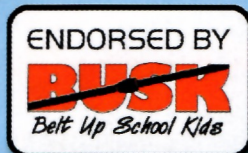
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Street's ahead

Duke of York meets StreetCar during 'Ascot' event

WHAT'S ON PETER NEWMAN'S MIND? TURN TO PAGE 39

Safety and comfort for the next generation



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INSIDE THIS WEEK

MORE THAN JUST THE TICKET There's an air of confidence at Almex as the German-owned company launches new products with 'open architecture' - programming you can customize

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TOUR NEWS Incoming tour operators are worried that an increase in the cost of a visa to visit the UK will hit tourist numbers this summer



OPEN PLATFORM A mystery writer known only as 'The Pensioner' wades into all things new in a savage attack



MONEY MATTERS Talking of pensioners, can you afford to retire? Get some hints from 'the experts'

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'ASCOT' HAILED A COACHING SUCCESS

Two years planning pay off as York absorbs racegoers

ANDREW JAROSZ CORRESPONDENT

DESPITE fears of chaos in York, most coach operators found the going easy as a convoluted traffic management plan was brought in to funnel coach traffic to last week's five-day Royal Ascot race meeting.

York City Council and the Police, who were expecting up to 70,000 racegoers and visitors to descend on the racecourse per day, spent two years planning special arrangements to ensure that life in the city would carry on as normal, without the usual traffic headaches of race days.

In the event, the coach parks, with room for 400 vehicles, never filled up, possibly due to the £80 parking charge imposed, where normally parking is free, rain in the early part of the week dampened attendances, and coach operators allowed extra time to overcome the inevitable congestion on the A64, which was the only authorised route to the coach parks.

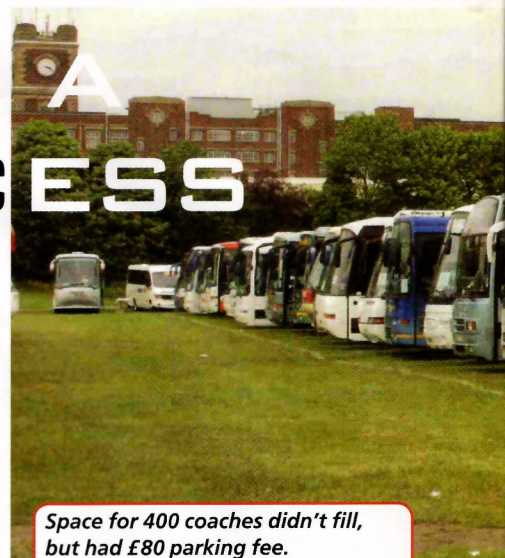
On the other hand bus operators reported a

wonderful day. East Yorkshire MD Peter Shipp said that the traffic was well managed, and Peter Edwards said that First York services suffered fewer delays and lost mileage than in an ordinary week.

Peter Bibby, MD of Bibbys of Ingleton said that the secret was to get there early: "We impress upon organisers that, when you go to a major event, you need to add a couple more hours," he said. "One hour 20 minutes from Bradford to the racecourse was not bad, but when the jams built up around lunchtime, we were already there."

He said that they had taken on a really late job, without having the necessary paperwork, but still found the security staff helpful and welcoming.

His view was echoed by Malcolm Burnett of Durham City Coaches, who said that the new routing had presented no problems. "One of



Space for 400 coaches didn't fill, but had £80 parking fee.

our parties was lunching in the city first, and after contacting the Police, they let us into the centre by the direct route, and then let us go straight to the racecourse, without joining the official route," he said. Even though a coach broke down on one of the days on the route out, it did not present any delay.

Despite all coaches coming from every direction having to go through the same junction of the A64, East Yorkshire Coaches reported few traffic problems with their excursions, which came from the east. Nevertheless Mark Brook

BAD MANAGEMENT PUTS HALF OPERATORS 'AT RISK'

EXPERTS are predicting disaster in the coach and bus industry if the economy goes into recession, saying just under half of operators are in danger of going bust.

Financial analysts Plimsoll Publishing assessed the industry's top companies over four years in terms of trading stability, profitability, working capital, gearing and immediate liquidity using published audited accounts.

It rated 244 companies out of 554 as vulnerable to financial collapse, calling only 129 'strong'.

Seventy five of the danger companies were new entrants.

"With 129 companies in the strong rating section and 244 in the danger section, you can see how diverse the performances are at the moment," says David Pattison, senior analyst at Plimsoll.

"Frankly it's hard to predict where the market is going in the second half of 2005. Recession or no recession, that's the question."

The top companies enjoy pre-tax margins of around 10% while 'danger' companies struggle along on margins of 4%, and four times the debt of their healthier counterparts.



First: seized the initiative

RACECOURSE SHUTTLE SHIFTS 8,000 A DAY IN YORK

FIRST'S Racecourse Shuttle in York operated surprisingly smoothly, moving up to 8,000 return passengers each day.

After being involved in the traffic planning with the city council and the Police, First York brought in 25 new single deckers from Oldham and Halifax, to operate a frequent shuttle service at £3 a time to an from the station. First has been told to expect 12,000 rail passengers, although in the event, the forecast was rather optimistic, with the figure of 8,000, only being reached on the last two days.

Nevertheless, First set its stall out, and greeted all rail passengers, many of whom already had a bus add-on ticket. First had drafted in a number of management trainees

to sell tickets on the kerbside, as the new buses have not yet been fitted with ticket machines, although between 1400hrs and 1600hrs, buses ran with conductors.

First's commercial manager Peter Edwards said that, at peak times, more than one bus a minute filled up and got away. "This was an excellent pre-payment exercise, and the organisation went totally according to plan, although we did get better as the week went on," he said.

It was also clear that the bus company had seized the initiative away from the taxi cabs, so much so that one taxi driver reported at 1300hrs, that she had not taken a single fare to the racecourse.



of Courtesy Coach Travel of Oldham said that his drivers thought it was chaotic, as it took them over an hour to get out of York, and then only an hour and a half to get home. He also thought that the £80 parking charge was excessive.

The city's traffic management plan may well be repeated on forthcoming race days, although no announcement has been made yet. Last week's exercise, which involved hundreds of traffic cones and no-parking bollards was a test bed for a future legacy system suitable for operating the normal York race calendar.-
andrew.jarosz@ntlworld.com

NO BANS FOR BUSES, SAYS SURVEY

A NEW survey says 90% of the general public thinks Britain's roads are too congested, and that nearly two thirds think better public transport would help solve the problem.

The survey also reveals that almost half of the general public support a national road-user charging scheme for peak time travel. The survey was conducted before the Government's recent announcement on road user charging, and subsequent mass media speculation about excessive charges.

Interestingly, only 3% of respondents say coaches should be banned from the roads during heavy congestion periods, and only 1% would ban buses.

"These findings suggest there is significant support for the idea of road user charging as long as it is targeted at the real problem times, and as long as the overall tax burden remains constant," says Grant Klein, head of transport at Detica, the transport consultancy that commissioned the survey.

"Encouragingly, the public overwhelmingly acknowledge the congestion problem, which at least establishes a good platform from which to begin the debate."

Although road user charging is a popular solution to peak time travel, respondents thought vehicles should be taxed on their engine size, emissions or type of vehicle.

CPT URGES LEZ RESPONSE

THE CPT is urging its members to say what they think of the London's Low Emissions Zone - or risk the full implementation of the Mayor of London's plan for the capital.

Ken Livingstone's controversial plan aims to remove the worst polluting vehicles from the area bordered by the M25, and is aiming to bar any coach older than Euro 3, or any Euro 2 vehicle without a particulate trap.

Many operators feel coaches and buses are being unfairly targeted since research has shown the worst pollution comes from HGVs and old taxis. Robust data will be needed by the CPT to ensure the potentially negative effects of this legislation on the coach and bus industry are minimised.

The CPT aims to get a system of permits adopted, where non-compliant vehicles will be allowed into the LEZ on payment of a charge: "If the LEZ plan is implemented as is, it will have a serious effect on the industry," says a spokesman for CPT. "Plenty of companies, particularly the smaller family run firms, will find meeting this requirement a considerable challenge."

The Mayor's final proposal on the scheme will be published in July and the formal consultation period is expected to begin in early 2006. The CPT needs details of fleet age, engine standards and how often the operator uses potentially non-compliant vehicles within Greater London.

LEZ FACTFILE

- LEZ may cover the whole of Greater London
- LEZ will initially target lorries, buses and coaches
- LEZ could be introduced after late 2006
- Standard for entry into a LEZ should start at Euro II + RPC
- Alongside an LEZ, schemes to tackle the very oldest cars and vans should be investigated
- The suggested LEZ should achieve a 20% reduction in total PM10 emissions in 2010, and a 40% reduction in the area of London exceeding the relevant PM10 air quality targets
- www.london-lez.org



EDITOR'S COMMENT

COME FLY WITH ME...

THE number of coach operators who have come to the conclusion that they are really travel agents is growing.

An area of tourism largely rejected by the big High Street travel agents, coaching has had to fend for itself. As the years have gone on, operators have become extremely expert at selling tours and excursions direct to their customer database, and growing the database itself in a multitude of ways.

Some, of course, own a travel agency but even those who not are, beyond doubt, performing the role of both tour operator and travel agent. This explains why there is increasing enthusiasm for selling cruise and flight-based holidays - if the operator doesn't, someone else will.

If you've ever thought the possibility worth looking into, come with me to Krakow this November and take a look for yourself. Not only will we be exploring one of Poland's most beautiful cities and its two biggest attractions, we'll drop in on a Polish coach operator, who will explain what he could do for your groups. I know of no operator who would entrust his customers to someone else without first-hand knowledge...

I'm really looking forward to seeing Krakow in the snow and meeting our readers. On hand, we'll have one of Success Tours' experts, and local guiding throughout. It will be a real busman's holiday and I hope you can make it!

Mark Williams

Mark Williams

EDITOR

PRINCE ANDREW SEES THE STREETCAR

'Ascot at York' visitor draws attention of royalty on first outing since launch

ANDREW JAROSZ CORRESPONDENT

THE most surprising star of Ascot week at York, wasn't a coach, but the Wrightbus StreetCar, which came into the city on Thursday, to make its first public appearance since its March launch (CBW, March 17).

Because it is still involved in Millbrook testing, and has not yet been certified for service, the StreetCar operated on trade plates, and entered the city centre after the evening peak, to be displayed outside the city's Mansion House.

It was shown off to the Lord Mayor, members of the city council, and Prince Andrew - Duke of York, who viewed the vehicle from the 'relative safety' of the Mansion House.

The Wrightbus StreetCar has been developed in partnership with First, which has committed itself to purchasing at least 100 vehicles. Firm orders for 39 have been placed and the first 11 are due in York next January for

the conversion of route 4 to the University. The next order will go to Leeds for the conversion of its route 4 from Pudsey. StreetCar number 2 is presently under construction, and Wrights is confident that delivery will be on time.

The tram-like articulated bus seats fewer than 50, but has adequate standing accommodation for high loads. It is powered by a Volvo D7275 7.3-litre engine, through a six-speed ZF automatic gearbox. The interior, like its exterior is styled like a tram, and the interior features sideways-facing seats which create lounge areas.

The Duke of York was hosting a community awards ceremony at the Mansion House, and Peter Edwards, commercial manager of First, and William Wright were also invited. The Duke quizzed both men over the environmental impact of operating articulated buses through a historic city, but

was generally supportive of plans to upgrade public transport.

Peter Edwards said that it was a shame that security men had stopped the Duke from inspecting the StreetCar. "We did show the

vehicle to the Lord Mayor and other members of the council, so they now realise what sort of quality commitment we have to upgrading bus services in this city," he said.



StreetCar: Duke of York kept low profile for security, says Peter Edwards (left)

● Coaches avoid chaos at 'Ascot' event - see pages 4 and 5

NO-FRILLS SCHOOLBUS ON TRUCK CHASSIS

BY BILL GODWIN



A TOUCH of American schoolbus practice, acknowledging the vast experience which that continent has gained in the sector, is reflected in the debut of a new model from VDL-Jonckheere.

Styling of the new model from the Belgian member of the VDL Group is distinguished by the retention of the standard truck cab of the DAF FA 45 chassis selected as a base for the new low-cost vehicle. The bodywork of the Jonckheere schoolbus is available in two lengths with seating for 42 or 46 pupils,

resulting in overall lengths of 9.50m or 10.20m respectively. Stainless steel framing is used for the body grafted on to the rear of the DAF cab. Panelling is a combination of stainless steel and aluminium.

All auxiliary and driveline units are easily accessible. A single door, 650mm wide, is fitted between the first and second window bay while an emergency door is provided at the rear of the body.

Power unit options include the DAF CE 136 C and CE 162 C (180bhp and 220bhp) engines well-known for their optimum performance and fuel consumption. A ZF 6 S 850 manual transmission is standard equipment. Designed for a GVW of 11,990 kg the bus has steel suspension on the front and air on the drive axle.

DUTCH GET FIRST ADBLUE NETWORK

THE DUTCH have stolen a march on the rest of Europe by announcing the first national AbBlue distribution network.

The use of AdBlue is necessary to satisfy Euro IV engine legislation due for all new vehicles by October 2006. Mercedes-Benz already markets

vehicles using the new technology while other manufacturers are expected to launch similar vehicles from Autumn 2005.

"The UK is our main focus market," says a spokesman for GreenChem, the company developing the supply network for the chemical throughout Europe. "Negotiations with distributors and dealers are at an advanced stage in the UK and we hope to make an announcement within a few months."

"Initially we are looking at between 10 and 12 commercial filling points which we will develop as more vehicles reach the market."

Eventually the company aims for 1,500 filling points around Europe as a whole.

FACT FILE

ADBLUE is a urea-based additive derived from animal urine that, when injected into the exhaust catalyst, converts harmful nitrogen oxide emissions into nitrogen and water vapour in a process called Selective Catalytic Reduction.

PALFINGER ACQUIRES RATCLIFF TAIL LIFTS

PALFINGER AG has acquired Ratcliff Tail Lifts Ltd of Welwyn Garden City.

The deal remains subject to regulatory approval by the Austrian antitrust authority but is likely to be a straightforward transaction.

Palfinger is purchasing the tail lift and passenger lift division in its entirety from Ratcliff Group Ltd and it now becomes a wholly owned subsidiary of Palfinger AG and will trade as Ratcliff Palfinger.

Ratcliff currently has around a one third share of the UK market established over 40 years of designing and producing lifts for the commercial and passenger markets.

The company employs over 200 staff and generates annual sales of about EUR 30 million (approaching GBP 20 million).

Combined with Palfinger's range of truck-mounted loading cranes and associated equipment Palfinger now assumes a market leadership position in the UK.

The move will also strengthen and support the pace of entry of Palfinger's tail lift range in the UK. Palfinger and Ratcliff have been co-operating in this area already for some time.

Plans are to integrate both companies as soon as possible, while existing production, sales and service arrangements will remain unchanged. Ratcliff's existing management team will continue to run the business and it will retain a level of autonomy and independence.

"We expect additional synergies especially in the purchasing area, which will gradually have a positive effect on operational and financial results," said Palfinger CMO Herbert Ortner.

The Ratcliff Group retains Stone Hardy - its national service company, Wessex Medical - manufacturers of specialist lifts for disabled people in the built environment, and Planet Flowline.

DAWSON REJOINS MCKENNA BROS

DEREK DAWSON has rejoined McKenna Brothers as commercial director.

He comes back to the Manchester-based destination equipment specialist after 14 months as national account manager for Wrightbus.

Commenting on the move, Derek said: "It was a tough decision to leave Wrightbus but I believe that McKenna Bros is in a very strong position within the UK market and ready to take the business to another level." He also expressed his thanks to Wrightbus for their support - in particular Mark Nodder and Sam McLaren.

Vincent McKenna, MD of McKenna Bros, said: "I am delighted to have Derek back. He is a valuable addition to our team and his vast knowledge of the industry will be a major asset to the company." Derek spent his first week with McKenna's in Rome supporting their partner Mobitec at UITP.

MAJOR SHAKE-UP FOR LONDON D-A-R

LONDON'S Dial-a-Ride services are receiving a major shake-up with the introduction of 32 ramp-access Mercedes Vitos.

Based on the long-bodied Vito 111CDi, each vehicle is built to accommodate three passengers - including one in a wheelchair and two in the forward saloon area. Wheelchair passengers board via a hinged ramp inside the rear door and the angle of approach is eased using lowering air suspension. A powered winch is available to assist boarding. Once secured on the flat floor, wheelchair passengers are at the same level as other passengers. An unobtrusive roof pod above the wheelchair position provides plenty of headroom for taller occupants.

Ambulant DAR passengers are catered for by two electrically powered, swivelling, height adjustable seats. These emerge through the sliding door apertures on each side of the vehicle and allow disabled or infirm passengers to board and alight without using a step.

All vehicles have been supplied by Pentagon and the conversion work has been done by Salvador Caetano UK at Waterlooville. London Dial-a-Ride expects to be running 200 of these vehicles in two years time.

Dial-a-Ride services cater for those who find it difficult or impossible to use mainstream public transport. Passengers are all registered clients who book their journeys in advance and pay a subsidised bus fare. Typical journeys are for shopping or visits to the doctor. DAR services do not make hospital visits.

Previously run by regional charity organisations, the services were taken over by Transport for London in 2002 in a bid to provide better integration with other services and

to bring standardisation to the levels of service provided. They now fall under the responsibility of Jeff Chamberlain - MD of London Buses.

The new vehicles are taking over from typical accessible minibuses with tail lifts and a usual capacity of eight. The fleet stood at 300 such minibuses but they were seldom used with a full complement of passengers. The revised fleet will retain a significant number of conventional minibuses where the capacity can be used efficiently but the aim has been to standardise on a vehicle that does not give the impression it is a welfare vehicle or operating a social service.



Side-swinging seats (left) unique feature of new Vitos



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NATEX WINS G8 CONTR

Press corps being coached from major airports... and Souter weighs in

MARK WILLIAMS, EDITOR/ANDREW PEACE, REPORTER

NATIONAL Express is believed to have won the massive contract to supply press coaches to the G8 Summit conference next month.

The contract will involve around 80 coaches for three days, serving Prestwick, Glasgow and Edinburgh airports 24 hours a day, with a ten-minute frequency. The Government tender specified air-conditioned coaches with toilets and DVD.

Security as the coaches get in and out of Gleneagles - the conference venue - is likely to be tight. At this spring's CPT Scottish Conference, US security personnel were already assessing the site.

Tendering for the G8 Summit went out late, and only National Express Coaches, Excel of Stansted, The King's Ferry and

Prestige of Edinburgh bid for the work. One bidder, who preferred not to be named, admitted that his bid was more than double that of National Express.

National Express was unable to comment before CBW went to press.

■ STAGECOACH is throwing its weight behind the G8 protest by laying on subsidised coaches to transport activists to Edinburgh during the summit in July.

Up to 1,000 activists are expected to take advantage of the £8 London to Edinburgh return offer.

World leaders are meeting at the Gleneagles Hotel near the city from July 6 to 8 to consider ways to solve poverty and debt problems in Africa. Timed to coincide with the summit is the 'Long March to Justice' rally,

followed by a Live8 concert at Murrayfield Stadium. Bob Geldof has called for a million people to attend the protest.

Brian Souter, Stagecoach chief executive, was quoted as saying: "Having operated buses in Africa, we have seen the huge scale of the poverty problem and the devastating effect of the AIDS pandemic."

"We support the objectives of the Make Poverty History coalition and Gordon Brown's aid for trade initiative and we hope our offer of low-cost transport to the rally in Edinburgh next month will help get the message across loud and clear."

The company is providing 12 megabus.com double-deckers, which will leave London late on July 5 and return after the concert on July 6.



GO-AHEAD ACQUIRES SOUTHERN VECTIS

GO-AHEAD Group has acquired the Isle of Wight-based Southern Vectis operation after its offer gained valid acceptances for 94.4% (18,647,045) of the existing issued ordinary share capital.

The group says that, prior to the announcement of its offer, it had received irrevocable undertakings to accept

the offer from the directors and other key shareholders in respect of 11,660,573 shares, representing 59% of the existing issued share capital of Southern Vectis. Having met all the required conditions, Go-Ahead has declared the offer wholly unconditional.

The conclusion of the deal brings the Southern Vectis and

Solent Blue Line operations into the Go-Ahead fold. Chief executive Chris Moyes said: "This brings a welcome expansion of our interests in the South of England - in an area where population continues to grow."

Both are good companies and will continue to run under the direction of Alan White and Phil

Stockley.

It's our policy to continue letting local management make their own decisions within Go-Ahead guidelines. I'm sure they will profit from the increased benefits of group purchasing and from some of the operating experience we have accumulated within Go-Ahead."

'TALKING TIMETABLE'

A CITY council is installing a hi-tech equipment trial to help bus passengers with sight problems.

Two bus stops in Leicester known to be used by blind and partially sighted people will be equipped with a device which will tell them when to expect the next bus. Passengers with sight problems will be given a key fob, which will activate a recorded message at the stop. A second button on the fob will list the services that call at that stop.

The system is similar to ones used to give audio tours at attractions throughout the country. It will cost £1,000 to install it at each stop. Leicester's traffic control chiefs say the scheme may be extended.

UNIQUE DART ARRIVES ON IOM

ISLE OF MAN Transport has taken delivery of a unique midibus based on the 10.8m Dart.

Managing director David Howard said: "We wanted something specifically to match our requirements and what we've had built is a 10.8m Dart with a six-cylinder engine instead of the four-cylinder

unit, and an East Lancs body that gives us a width of 2.4m. I think it combines a Lolyne front, Myllennium sides and a new back."

"This is the first new single-deck bus we've bought for some time but we have a requirement for 12 and have been one short since we sold our Marshall-bodied

Darts. A few years back."

Isle of Man Transport has now bought 56 new buses in the last five years but, to date, all have been double deckers. Some 67 vehicles of the 85-vehicle fleet are now lowfloors and it is anticipated the fleet will be totally converted in another three years.

VOLVO BUS TO CLOSE PLANT

VOLVO BUS is to close its coach production plant in Heilbronn, Germany.

The formal decision to cease production was taken by directors at Volvo Busse Industries (Deutschland) GmbH. The

decision will affect around 150 people.

Only one product, the 9900, was built at the plant - creating a unique low volume product that has lost money for some years and is now deemed incapable

of sustaining its existence. Volvo has tried a number of alternatives to try to secure a future for Heilbronn, including searching for a buyer for all, or part, of the business. No buyer has been found.

ACT

Press being coached to and from Gleneagles



EVENTS

June 23: Understanding Transport & Development Planning, annual TRICS User Meeting, National College of Ireland, International Financial Services Centre, Dublin. ian.coles@jmp.co.uk

June 23: Fleet Safety Forum Best of the Best Annual Conference, University of Huddersfield. 01484 559983

June 28: National Transport Awards Dinner, London Hildton, 01224 263124

June 29: 8th UK Chairs of Transport Conference, CBI, Conference Centre London. 01224 263134, www.abs.ac.uk/cftp

August 2-4: RDA Workshop, Cologne, Germany. www.rda-workshop.de

August 14: Wessex Transport Society fourth Festival of Transport, Avon Heath Country Park, A31, near Ring wood, Hants. 01202 293245

September 12-14: Tourism Ireland education trip to East Ireland (including Dublin). 020 7518 0800, fcreeon@tourismireland.com

September 14-15: Passenger Transport Solutions, Olympia, London. www.aboutpts.com

September 15: RDA Market Seminar, Bridgewood Manor Hotel, Rochester, Kent. Dr.patridge@t-online.de, 0049 6997 84 0206

September 19-21: Tourism Ireland education trip to West Ireland. 020 7518 0800, fcreeon@tourismireland.com

GUN ENTHUSIAST REFUSED O-LICENCE BY COMMISSIONER

AT a public inquiry guarded by police, South Eastern and Metropolitan traffic commissioner Chris Heaps has refused an O-licence to a man who had seven spent firearms offences.

Jocelyn Thompson first applied for an operating licence in August last year, having admitted that he had driven PSVs against the advice of the Traffic Area Office for two years previously. Mr Thompson subsequently withdrew his application in November.

He applied again a month later for a standard national licence for one vehicle and, in March 2004, applied for his PCV driving licence, admitting the unspent firearms convictions.

Mr Heaps decided that, when spent, the convictions did not make Mr Thompson unfit to hold a PCV licence under the rules, and granted the licence at the end of March 2004. However, Mr Heaps decided the convictions may be relevant in considering his O-licence application.

At a Public Inquiry in April, 2005, Mr Heaps asked Mr Thompson 'in camera' why the offences should not be considered: "In response, Mr Thompson commented upon the 'insane nature' of the law in the UK relating to firearms under which he had been convicted, and compared them with the different attitude towards guns adopted by other

countries in Europe and the USA," says the written decision from Mr Heaps.

"He told me that he had pleaded guilty to the offences of which he had been convicted on the advice of his barrister but he remained adamant that he had 'done nothing wrong.'" Mr Heaps also pointed out that Mr Thompson had been detained under the Mental Health Act but had been unconditionally discharged in August 2002.

At the inquiry, an objection from Kent Police was also considered on the grounds that Mr Thompson might be a danger to the public. A police inspector added that Mr Thompson was on police bail following the seizure of a gun, though he had not been charged for any offence.

A witness, transport consultant Paul Carless, told the inquiry that, in a phone call in December 2004, Mr Thompson claimed he was being victimised because he liked guns, and threatened to "fill the court with uniformed riflemen" on the day of the inquiry. He was also alleged to have threatened to "teach Sussex Police a lesson they would never forget" if he was refused a licence.

Mr Thompson denied having had the conversation, though Mr Carless said he'd made notes and called

South East and Metropolitan Traffic Area (SEMTA) office because he had been so concerned about what was said.

Despite having only a provisional driving licence and pass certificate, and against the advice of SEMTA, Mr Thompson said he had driven for Arriva, C&S Coaches and Hams Travel between 2002 and 2004.

Since July 2004, Mr Thompson said his business had been trading using a third party's O discs for periods of 14 days, on legal advice that this was OK.

But in a written decision, Mr Heaps accepted that Mr Thompson had made the threats referred to by Mr Carless, and that Mr Thompson's behaviour gave him cause for concern: "I have taken into account Mr Thompson's body language and demeanour at public inquiry, and his (no doubt genuinely held) belief that UK firearms legislation is based on 'completely nonsensical gun paranoia' and is 'insane'."

Mr Heaps said he believed the repute of the company was tarnished by the threats and that it had operated PSVs illegally. He also removed Mr Thompson's entitlement to drive PSVs but cautioned operators that they should not accept test pass certificates as evidence that drivers are entitled to drive.

LAWYER'S LEGS HOLD OUT

TRANSPORT Lawyer Nick Marshall of Backhouse Jones Solicitors has achieved his aim of cycling from Lands End to John O'Groats in less than seven days, with sponsorship from the industry.

Nick left Lands End at 0850hrs on Friday May 20 2005 and arrived at John O'Groats on Thursday May 26 2005.

He battled thunderstorms, hail and rain to complete his epic journey in a total time of six days 13 hours, 21 minutes and 48 seconds. The journey covered exactly 947 miles. In total Nick spent exactly 52.4 hours in the saddle.

Nick said: "The highlight of my trip was the journey through the Highlands and, in particular, the view from the top of Glen Coe.

The transport lawyer has received pledges of over £10,000 and the money will be collected and donated to the National Children's Home.



Ian K Jones of Backhouse Jones said: "My only concern is what Nick plans to do next year. While

at Lands End he glanced at the Channel and is now contemplating swimming it next year."

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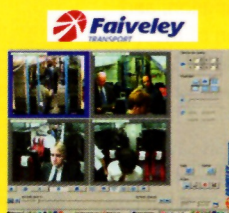
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FEARS OVER VISA PRICE

WILLIAM GOLDEN, CORRESPONDENT

INCOMING tour operators are worried that an increase in the cost of a visa to visit the UK will hit tourist numbers this summer.

Giving less than a month's notice, the Government has announced that the cost of a typical tourist visa, which allows multiple entries to the UK, will rise by nearly 40% from £36 to £50. For students, the increase will be even greater - a rise of more than 130% from £36 to £85.

The steep rise has dismayed tour operators who bring visitors to Europe as it will hit the most price-sensitive visitors the hardest and is likely to deter some from

coming to the UK altogether. These include incoming students and visitors from most of Asia and Latin America. They see Europe as a single destination, often purchasing a coach tour of the major cities.

Tom Jenkins, the executive director of the European Tour Operators Association (ETOA), points out that, if a European itinerary including the UK is substantially more expensive than one for the same number of days that excludes the UK, some incoming visitors will drop the UK leg.

This would lose significant export revenue as visitors will

choose to fly in to other hub cities rather than London.

As things stand, incoming visitors to Continental Europe need purchase only one Schengen visa, for £14 but must go to the trouble and expense of purchasing an additional visa to visit Britain.

For those people visiting the UK as part of a European sightseeing tour and staying in budget hotels, the price of the visa will soon be equivalent to the cost of two nights' accommodation.

Tom Jenkins said: "In response to the high visa costs, ETOA members have had to develop itineraries which omit the UK.

These are outperforming those that include it. The price of a visa

to enter the UK has clearly reduced demand.

"Currently, a UK visa is twice the cost of a Schengen visa, which gives access to 15 countries in Continental Europe. From July, it will be more than three times the price, which will make Britain look spectacularly expensive to foreign clients even before they arrive.

"It will hit hard such areas as South America and China, as these markets are extremely price sensitive. Thanks to Schengen, Europe is succeeding in establishing a presence in new markets; Britain is perceived as an expensive bolt-on."

■ For more details go to www.ukvisas.gov.uk

ROYAL PACKAGES HELP BREAK HALF-MILLION SALES BARRIER

ENCORE Tickets is set to consolidate its position as the country's fastest growing trade-only ticket agency by breaking the 500,000 ticket sales barrier this summer with more options for coach operators.

The summer version of the company's Tickets Guide contains more than 20 new products for coach operators, including three Buckingham Palace packages featuring The White Wardrobe of clothes designed for Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother by Norman Hartnell.

The State Rooms at the Palace are open from July 30 to September 27 and Encore's initial package includes a two-hour audio tour of the State Rooms with a price of £12 per adult in groups of 15 or more.

Afternoon tea in the Grill Room

of the Café Royal can be added for £15.50, while a third package offers a lunch cruise on the Thames for an extra £17.50 per person.

The company has also expanded its packages to include visits to attractions such as Madame Tussauds, shows such as *The Rat Pack* or *The Far Pavilions* twinned with lunch, afternoon tea or dinner, Jack the Ripper tours, the London Dungeon, and a Thames combination of the London Eye, The Tower of London and a sightseeing cruise, or a new medieval banquet.

The guide also details savings of 50% or more for groups on Encore's core product of West End shows.

John Wales, the managing director of Encore, said: "The fact that we are going to hit half a million ticket sales this summer is thanks to the terrific support we have had from coach operators. They have booked with us because of prices but also because we have listened to what they want and improved our service as a result."

A recent innovation is the London Eye ticket delivery service. Encore collects booked tickets in advance and delivers them to clients' hotels so coach tour operators can take customers direct to the Eye for the pre-allocated time slot without delays for voucher



A recent innovation is the London Eye ticket delivery service.

exchanges for tickets.

Added John Wales: "Some fantastic new shows have launched in the West End, including Billy Elliott and Guys and Dolls. These have had a significant impact

on the level of our ticket sales and are very attractive for coach groups."

■ For a copy of the new guide call Encore on 020 7439 4000, or e-mail groups@encoretix.co.uk



Encore MD, John Wales.

INCREASES



Fears that tourist numbers to UK will decline

ORCHESTRAL MANOEUVRES

OPERATORS can take up the baton and conduct groups to the ten concerts in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) 2005-2006 season at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

Group Line is offering parties of ten or more £38 tickets reduced to £30.40, £30 tickets reduced to £24 and £20 tickets reduced to £16. Groups of 30 or more will get £38 tickets reduced to £26.60, £30 tickets reduced to £21 and, £20 tickets reduced to £14. Rates include one free programme per group member. All prices are per concert and group organisers receive a complimentary pair of tickets to an RPO concert of their choice.

The season starts on Thursday October 6 and the concerts are:

- Here Come the Choral Classics (October 6)
- Mahler's 'Resurrection' Symphony (October 18)
- Debussy's La Mer and Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring (October 27)
- Best of Broadway (November 3)
- Britten's 'War Requiem' (November 22)
- Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet (March 17 2006)
- Stravinsky's The Firebird Suite and Orff's 'Carmina Burana' (April 3)
- Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.3 and Shostakovich's Symphony No.5 (April 23)
- Symphonic Rock (May 5)
- Filmharmonic (June 1)
- For bookings and more information call Group Line on 0207 580 6793.

CHANGES AT NORMAN ALLEN GROUP TRAVEL

PAUL Mallon has been promoted to managing director of Norman Allen Group Travel Ltd.

He has been with the company for ten years and, in addition to his new responsibilities, will continue to manage Continental tour sales and product development.

Simon Allen has become chairman of Norman Allen Group Travel Ltd and remains as managing director of Norman Allen's sister company,

Greencastle Travel Ltd, which operates fly/coach tours for coach operators and private groups. Simon Allen said: "After 25 years at Norman Allen Group Travel - 20 of which have been at the helm - I am very pleased to be passing on day-to-day responsibility for running the firm. I have complete trust in his judgement"

Meanwhile Bronwyn Neal has been appointed sales manager for UK and Eire tours.

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CS TRAVEL'S FUTURE HANGS IN BALANCE

Director agrees maintenance record bad

BY JOE RILEY

THE future of a coach operator hangs in the balance after failing annual maintenance tests and getting a large number of roadside prohibitions.

CS Travel of Lincoln's reputation has also been called into question after it was discovered that a former director of the company had his O-licence revoked.

Director Clement Shipman agreed they had a bad maintenance record but said he wanted to "improve it very very quickly." He blamed the poor results on the garage which carried out the six-weekly maintenance checks and said he had now signed a contract with a new company.

He said he removed John Bird from the day-to-day running of CS Travel as soon as he heard he might lose his licence and insisted that Mr Bird now only worked as a part-time driver for the company. The public inquiry at City House in Cambridge heard that traffic examiner Philip Lapczuk and vehicle examiner Steve McKenna visited CS Travel on January 27 earlier this year, six months after Mr Shipman was given his operator's licence.

WHAT THE TRAFFIC EXAMINER SAID

Mr Lapczuk said the visit had been arranged to obtain details of which vehicles were being used under the new licence and to carry out routine checks.

He said: "Until the first visit we weren't sure which vehicles were on the licence. It's a usual procedure to visit about nine months after a licence is issued."

He said they discovered that four of the

five vehicles operated by CS Travel were or had been owned by John Bird of Birds Coaches Limited, who had originally helped to set up the new company but had lost his licence in August 2004. Most of the documentation still showed Mr Bird's address, even though he had officially resigned as a director in October 2004.

He said: "Mr Bird appears to be involved in the running of the business at the highest level and the registered address appears to be his home address. He still appears to have been involved even after he resigned as a director."

Mr Lapczuk said that, after the visit, he had a call from Lincolnshire County Council raising concerns about Mr Bird's connection with CS Travel in light of the fact he had lost his licence. He said the county council had become involved after Mr Bird attended a meeting with them to discuss school transport contracts. He said: "Concerns were raised by Lincolnshire County Council about the relationship between John Bird and Clement Shipman."

WHAT THE VEHICLE EXAMINER SAID

Vehicle examiner Steve McKenna said that, during the visit in January, he had also been concerned about the maintenance of the five-vehicle fleet - which included three coaches and two minibuses. He said that, on January 27, he checked a coach and a minibus and issued a defect notice after he discovered a bolt was missing from a passenger seat on the coach.

He said that, since Mr Shipman's licence



Eastern traffic commissioner Geoffrey Simms: written decision to follow

was granted last July, the company had also been given a number of roadside prohibitions, including a delayed defect notice for a broken seatbelt, a broken warning light and a leaking suspension unit. CS Travel's annual test record showed an 80% failure rate compared to a 27% national average. He said: "There were concerns with maintenance - a high roadside prohibition rate and a poor annual test history."

Mr McKenna said he re-visited the company on June 6 and the Volvo coach he tested was found to be satisfactory. He said vehicles were being inspected every six weeks as required and drivers were filling out daily check lists. He said: "I was shown the sheet for the vehicle I checked and it looked to be satisfactory."

WHAT DIRECTOR CLEMENT SHIPMAN SAID

Mr Shipman said he had been director of CS Travel since getting his operator's licence in July 2004. He said he worked for Lincolnshire Road Car from 1964 until he was made redundant in December 2003, then decided



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to start his own business. He said Mr Bird was a business acquaintance and a third man, Wayne Meredith, had suggested they should all set up a company together.

Mr Shipman said Mr Meredith had dropped out of the arrangement in March 2004, so he set up a partnership with Mr Bird called CS Travel using five vehicles that had belonged to Mr Bird. However, he took over the operating of the business on July 1, 2004 after he heard that Mr Bird had been called to a public inquiry. He said: "Mr Bird ceased to have anything to do with it on a day-to-day level."

However, he said Mr Bird held the finances. He added: "The vehicles were all on financial arrangements and it took a while to get them transferred across. In November 2004 CS Travel took over the payments."

The inquiry heard that, after Mr Bird lost his licence on August 14, 2004, his only involvement in CS Travel was as a driver. Mr Shipman said: "It was run on a 50/50 basis but he was told his only involvement with CS Travel would be as a driver and he was given a letter stating that in August. His only role has been and the only role he will have is simply as a driver. I use Mr Bird as a last resort. He has his own taxi business and that takes up a lot of his time. On average he drives three or four days a week, but it's usually just a morning's work."



MANAGERIAL ROLE

Mr Shipman denied that Mr Bird had any sort of managerial role and said he was treated no differently to the other drivers. He said he was hoping to buy Mr Bird out within the next 18 months and they had agreed a figure of £25,000. He said he also hoped to replace Mr Bird then as a driver.

He said: "He is a good driver, he's good with people, but I think it's better for him to go his own way and concentrate on his own business. I have built up a good reputation over the years and he could be a downfall. I don't want him to tarnish my reputation."

He said the relationship between him and Mr Bird was now "strained." There had been some problems with the paperwork catching up with the changes made within the company. He said an accountant was supposed to have changed Mr Bird's address over to the new address for CS Travel but this had not been done. He had since employed another accountant and this had now been altered.

Mr Shipman said his maintenance was carried out by JM Motors but explained he had become "disillusioned" with them. He said: "I've had numerous discussions regarding the performance of his operation." The garage had the vehicle in for a week before its annual test in January and it had then failed, even though they'd told him there were no problems.

He said: "I phoned to ask if the vehicle was all right and if there was a problem and they said no. Then I'm told on January 27 that it failed for such a simple thing as a headlight. I didn't know there were problems."

He said he had since changed garages and had now signed a three-month contract with A and G Commercials. He said: "I'm proposing to submit vehicles every six weeks. I've given them a three-month contract to see if they come up to scratch. If they don't I'll have to go elsewhere."

Nil defect drivers' reporting system tightened up

BAD MAINTENANCE RECORD

Mr Shipman accepted they had a bad maintenance record. He said: "It's not very good at all. It's one I would like to improve very very quickly. It's my aim now to concentrate on maintenance. I've been doing a lot of driving myself but now I have more drivers which means I can now concentrate on running the business and making myself a nuisance at the garage to make sure everything is done as it should be."

Eastern Traffic Commissioner Geoffrey Simms asked if Mr Shipman knew Mr Bird was going before a public inquiry. He said: "Yes, I met an inspector and he explained what was happening. I was pleased I had taken the operation away from him from July 1 and I said he now had to resign as a director."

Mr Simms said there was some concern as Mr Bird had written to Lincolnshire County Council in November 2004 asking for school contracts and signing as a director of CS Travel, even though he had supposedly resigned in October. He said Mr Bird had also signed a health and safety statement on behalf of CS Travel.

Mr Shipman said he had not known about Mr Bird's letter to the council or that he had filled in the health and safety statement. Mr Simms asked: "One of the reasons I took Mr Bird off the road was because of his poor maintenance and you are now operating the same vehicles and they are still failing so why should I not remove your licence?"

Mr Shipman said: "The garage has let me down and I have now changed garages. I've done something about it. I hope I'm a better operator than him."

Anton Balkitis, representing Mr Shipman, said: "He has accepted there has been some failings. He has improved on the position by putting in place fresh connections with a new contractor. This is not a situation which would need revocation of a licence."



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BUS CRIME: SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS

From: Alec Horner
MD, Minimise Your Risk,
Telscombe Cliffs,
East Sussex

I thought your feature on Bus Crime (CBW, June 9) was excellent but would add the following comments:

CCTV is fine, but make sure your local police and courts are equipped to handle modern technology. In a recent case an arsonist who was charged with causing £9,000 damage to a bus was found not guilty, essentially because neither the police nor the crown court were able to show the original high quality digital CCTV images provided by the operator and had to use very inferior old technology video to show the jury. You might have to 'sponsor' some additional equipment for the police, etc, otherwise your investment could be in vain.

Swab kits themselves only cost 80p each, not £80, provided you have got the local police 'on side' to analyse these for you. The police take DNA from all suspects these days and few additional samples should be no problem, provided you have convinced them that this anti-social behavior is unacceptable to the traveling public and your staff.

I understand that one of the most successful schemes where



3,500 kits were issued has resulted in six swabs being analysed to date but has resulted in one successful prosecution that has great potential to publicise the fact that this type of behavior is unacceptable on public transport and can result in a successful prosecution.

On a more general note, I agree with Andy Cambell's comments about the danger of the press blowing up these incidents out of all proportion. Again, the key is to get the press on your side and 'manage' what they publish - some companies are very good at this, others need to improve how they interact with the local 'rag'.

Finally, I believe we all need to remember that anti-social behavior is not something confined

to public transport but simply reflects what occurs generally in society and affects many other industries where workers interact with the public, especially at certain times of the day (and night). The Government wants to tackle 'yob' culture and, if operators and the industry view this as an 'opportunity' and make effective use of their position they can take advantage of it in both commercial terms, through increased security and use of their services, and also try to improve staff retention.

How many readers have used a late evening service recently and thought they and most of the other passengers would rather be travelling by other means and the driver would rather be employed doing some other work?

LETTER OF THE WEEK

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■ ALEC is quite right about swab kits but, as he says, you will need the co-operation of the police to get DNA analysis done. The price we quoted included this service as part of a package.

I agree also that we must not view 'yobbism' only in the context of coach and bus services - the culture for heavy drinking and the tendency for youth to create heroism from felony is something which has evolved in the last 15 years. Society as a whole is discovering the cost of this change in attitudes. Nonetheless, it behoves operators to ensure that their drivers and customers are safe, in conjunction with the police and local authorities, but without passing the buck for real action.

PHOTO NOT TAKEN BY BROWNIE

From: Mark Anderson
Anderson Travel
London SE1

I have read with great interest and some amusement the letter from Peter Rigarsford regarding the coach on the front cover of the *Guidance for Operating Coaches in London* leaflet enclosed with CBW

(CBW, May 26).

Unfortunately it would seem that Mr Rigarsford's knowledge of photography is as vintage as the vehicles he operates and sells phone cards and other PSV memorabilia for. The photograph was not taken with a 'box Brownie' but a modern digital camera which captures

the vehicle image in a split second although the coach was still, in fact, moving. I don't think Westminster is yet issuing parking tickets for vehicles in motion.

I look forward to my prize with anticipation but, please, no bus memorabilia.

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THANK GOD IT'S NOT THE GOOD OLD DAYS

This week we have allocated this column to someone who shall remain anonymous but wishes to be known as 'The Pensioner'

When I was a wee lad (a long time ago) catching the bus was so boring. I'd get to the bus stop and there was one of those quaint things called a timetable on it. You looked at it and it said there would be a bus coming along at 0830hrs. Then, at precisely 0830hrs, there it was, a shining RT or Routemaster.

I got on the bus, and arrived at my destination exactly when the timetable said I would - because there was no congestion like there is today because there were fewer cars and most people caught the bus to school or work.

Furthermore the bus was not delayed at the stop because on the bus was a strange being called 'a conductor'. This was actually another person who was employed solely to collect fares and maintain order on the bus, so that passengers weren't plagued by unruly school children, like I probably would have been had there been no conductor.

Conductors were also sometimes known as 'Clippies'. Some people thought this was because they had a manual machine strapped to their waist which they used to 'clip' the tickets with but actually they were so named because they used to clip unruly school kids round the ear (only joking).

Meanwhile, drivers were enclosed in a completely separate cab so there was absolutely no interference by passengers which could lead to the driver being distracted and crashing the bus - apart from, that is, a bell in the cab which could be activated by the passengers when they wanted the bus to stop and by the conductors when they wanted the bus to go. Simple init? Of course, in those days, they could afford to pay a two-person crew because there were that many

more passengers. Furthermore, I can never, ever, remember a bus breaking down.

Even before this there were things called 'trams' which actually today are making a bit of a comeback, they tell me. Well, these trams were funny things because they didn't produce any pollution at all, well not in the city anyway because their power source was electricity. There were also trolley-buses which also were pollution free - both air and noise. However, for some

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OR LOOK AT AN
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WILL TELL YOU
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THE NEXT BUS
IS PREDICTED
TO ARRIVE**

reason which I'm not sure about but it could be something to do with money, it was decided to get rid of these 'old-fashioned' vehicles and replace them with oil burning buses, which used to produce clouds of carcinogens, although today, thanks to the Common Market, which is now called the European Union, I am told, this unfortunate problem has been 'ironed out'.

In today's modern world, however, you can dial up on your mobile, or look at an all-singing all-dancing electronic display which will tell you exactly when the next bus is PREDICTED to arrive. "Due to total traffic gridlock in the city, the next bus will arrive in five hours 55 minutes" says the display as you wait in the wind and rain, getting soaked because the bus shelter has been virtually destroyed by vandals.

Take Portsmouth, for example. This city was featured in *The Guardian* recently as having possibly the most advanced 'real-time information' system in the country.

"The bus network in Portsmouth is 'literally an information superhighway' gushes the paper. "But instead of the Internet being like the road network, Portsmouth's road network is becoming like the Internet?"

Eh? Does this mean that Portsmouth's traffic is now travelling close to the speed of light? I don't think so. "Portsmouth has built one of the most advanced wireless mesh networks in civilian use. A mesh network is a decentralised and inexpensive form of radio communication technology developed by the US military so its special forces can communicate behind enemy lines," says the paper. So just who is the enemy in Portsmouth - is it the car, or the bus passenger? However, the paper admits: "Using ex-commando communication technology doesn't make the bus go any quicker, of course, but it does save bus operators money." Right, now I'm beginning to understand!

But there's more: "And it is not just Portsmouth buses that are going online," said the Guardian. "In-car Internet access is rapidly appearing in the rear view mirror. In April, Toyota unveiled G-Book Alpha, a satellite-based car navigation system due to arrive in Japan next year. Not only can you talk on the phone over the network via Bluetooth, and download music, movies and mobile games as you hurtle down the motorway, but the system is fitted with automatic crash notification software. In the event of an accident, the G-Book, alarmed by the sudden burst of the airbag, alerts emergency services to the car's precise grid coordinates... Even if the passengers are unconscious (or dead, presumably), ambulance crews can be dispatched." Marvellous, isn't it? Thank God for progress.





Tempo - prepare to be dazzled

Introducing the dazzling new Tempo from Optare. Styled for maximum passenger appeal, this new generation single decker will certainly turn heads – but there's more to the Tempo than just looks. Wide doors and a low floor offer easy access; contemporary fabrics, curved handrails and 'uplighting' throughout create a more pleasant ambience; the heating system creates a more relaxing travelling environment. It's smoother and quieter too, making journeys even more enjoyable. As society seeks to tempt motorists from their cars, the Tempo's superior specification provides operators with a high quality vehicle designed for the utmost in passenger satisfaction. Be enlightened: to find out more about the new Tempo, call Optare today on 0113 264 5182.



CAN YOU AFFORD IT?

OPERATORS ARE OFTEN TOO BUSY TO CONSIDER RETIREMENT, SAYS PAUL FUSSELL

IT is fair to say that often business owners are too busy to think about their retirement plans.

For many, it seems to be a distant mirage on the horizon, while for others it is approaching quicker than anticipated.

Whether retirement is in the next ten or 20 years, when making plans or even reviewing existing plans on a regular basis, it is vital to ensure that sufficient funds are available to meet all of your commitments and give you the lifestyle that you desire.

Gone are the days when someone always retires at 65. Retirement age is slowly decreasing. For some, the desired age for retirement is now 55, or even 50. However, the age at which you want to retire does not necessarily go hand in hand with when you can afford to retire.

The age for retirement will be influenced by the success of the business in the future, and

the arrangements for a smooth succession. Having established this timetable, you will be in a position to start calculating your wealth requirements to ensure you reach your goal.

If we say, for example, your annual income is £100,000, which equates to approximately £65,000 net of tax, on the assumption this meets your current requirements consideration needs to be made as to how much is required each year in retirement. It may be the case that mortgages and loans have been repaid, therefore reducing the requirement. A more realistic annual income may be in the region of say, £35,000, net of tax.

To generate this kind of return, based on current annuity and interest rates on properties, a 5-6% return on individual assets is realistic. This means that total assets on retirement of approximately £900,000 to £1,000,000 are required before tax, assuming

CONTACT DETAILS

FOR more information on retirement and the Wealth Tracker software, or to discuss other issues affecting your business, contact Paul Fussell of Hazelwoods LLP business advisers and chartered accountants (paf@hazelwoods.co.uk) on 01452 634800, website www.hazelwoods.co.uk/Bus_Coach

This article has been prepared as a guide to topics of current financial interest. We strongly recommend you take professional advice before making decisions on matters discussed here. No responsibility for any loss to any person acting as a result of this material can be accepted by us.

that the 5% remains a realistic figure.

Clearly, with events in the last few years, it is unlikely individuals will wish to generate all of their income from pensions. They are more likely to have a more balanced investment spread across pensions, investments, property, etc, and possibly other sources such as trusts and inheritances.

Working out what an individual needs for retirement is the easy part. The difficult

part is working out how to get there based upon an individual's current assets.

WEALTH TRACKER

Hazelwoods LLP has developed software that essentially generates a personal profit-and-loss and balance sheet, based upon an individual's current assets and liabilities.

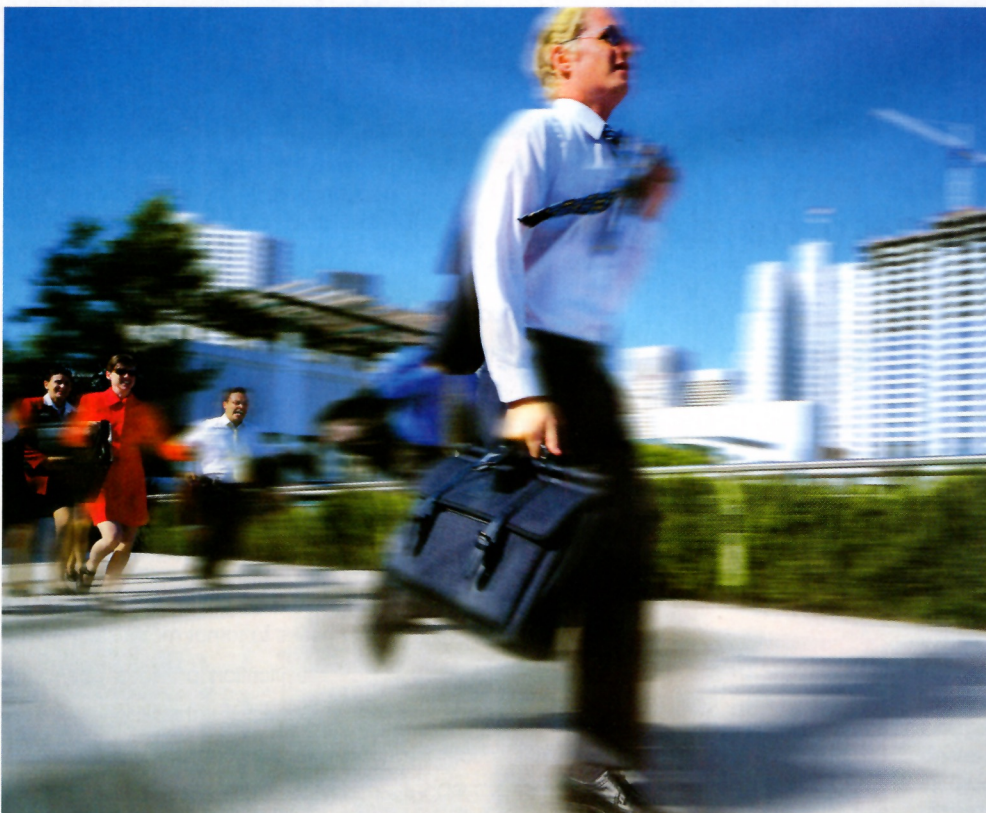
The software projects forward to the date of desired retirement, taking into account current income and expenditure, assets and liabilities, taxation, as well as specific events such as holidays, school fees, etc, to assess whether the plans currently in place are sufficient to meet your objectives.

The software will identify whether adjustments are needed to the original plans. It will also demonstrate how small changes, eg, paying off mortgages early, or a regular increased personal pension contribution will affect your overall retirement position.

CONCLUSION

To meet your desired objectives it is important that you are actively managing your finances and your personal balance sheet.

We have seen a volatile stock market over recent years and the effect of over exposure to particular types of investments. This has encouraged many people to look at a different spread of risk for their investments.





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MARK WILLIAMS, EDITOR

There's an air of confidence at Almex, which must be licking its lips with anticipation of the new zeal for cashless ticketing and free bus passes.

The opportunity presented not only in the UK but across the world by smartcard has taken years to reach the stage where there's both confidence and political will to roll out systems. Not only that, but to make smartcard work, it needs a landscape that suits it.

London's Oyster card exists because of the need for it; it would have been impossible to manage multi-modal public transport without smartcard. And now, with the Government's plans for free concessionary travel, more opportunities are presenting themselves.

In the UK, Scotland looks to be the next substantial system up for tender, with plans that the entire province gets cashless, concessionary ticketing which allows the reimbursement process to be handled centrally for millions of passengers. Already,

STAND-ALONE VALIDATOR

ALMEX' new on-board smartcard validator - revealed exclusively to CBW - not only knows where it is but can 'talk' wirelessly to the depot.

By combining widely-available wireless technology and the open architecture of its Windows-based software, it offers the operator a machine which needs only a power connection to check, validate and charge the right price to passengers. Previous validators have needed to be connected to the driver's ticket machine.

"We had some success selling the Smartfare II, which went to Nottingham and elsewhere, but it's not an 'intelligent' validator," said Mr Aitken. "For large smartcard schemes where the local authority retains control you require a more powerful validator."

A peek inside the almex.smartfare IV reveals that it combines hardware such as a PCMCIA pluggable wireless card and CompactFlash memory modules - components available cheaply in High Street computer stores. Using such computer industry standard components has the added bonus of making Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) fairly simple to add through GPS.

Drivers can monitor passengers



using the machine through a range of different buzzes and bleeps programmed into the validator, alarms sounding for invalid cards.

- Autonomous operation - no connection to other equipment
- Based on Optima technology
- Open platform offering operator configuration
- Windows base is 'future proof'
- Standard componentry for easy replacement

HÖFT & WESSEL IS A PROJECT-DRIVEN COMPANY, WHICH THRIVES ON DEVELOPING NEW PRODUCTS.

a trial in Dumfries and Galloway has proved its worth and now the tenders have gone out for the first big tranche of new technology.

Almex feels it is now poised to pounce on these opportunities, and has tenders in for the supply of 15,000 ticket machines. A part of Hanover company Höft & Wessel since 1999, Almex and sister company Metric Group has put huge sums into its R&D with the result that it has a suite of products

for every purpose and a philosophy which seems irresistible.

The only thing holding them back, says sales manager Alistair Aitken, is that operators have taken a buying holiday while they await details of the direction local government is going: "The market this year has been skewed by the fact that there will be some funding for smartcard projects, and operators are waiting to see what happens."

Nonetheless, Almex and Metric Group say they are ready for the challenge. Mr Aitken admitted that, before the Höft & Wessel buyout, things weren't so good: "We'd lost a lot of market share to competitors, and we had limited funds to develop new products."

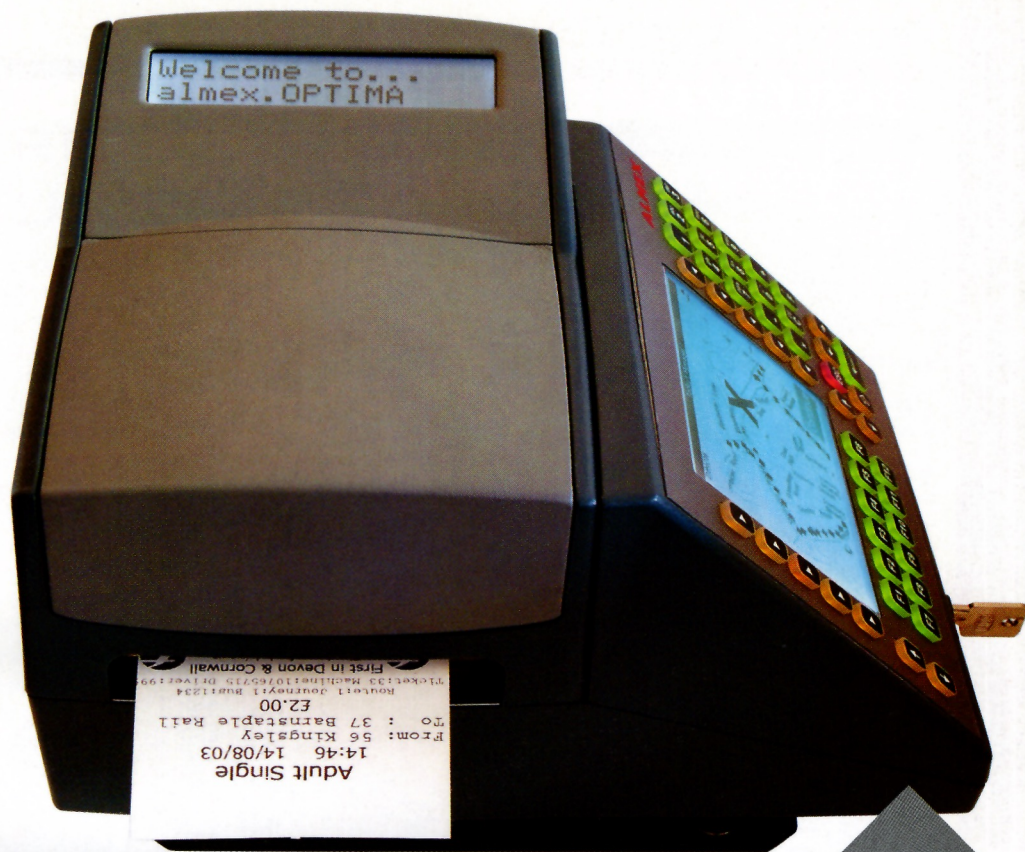
"But Höft & Wessel is a project-driven company, which thrives on developing new products. It's been a productive relationship."

"Three years ago, we knocked down the barriers and recognised that operators have IT systems of their own," explained Mr Aitken. "We set about designing the whole platform of products with 'open architecture' - a Windows-based system that means

S NITY

FACTFILE

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TEL: 01285 651441
EMAIL: A.AITKEN@ALMEX.CO.UK
WWW.ALMEX.CO.UK



no operator buying our machines is tied into our support.

"The market no longer wants machines which require special software which only we can support, and which only interfaces with our machines. So we set about basing all our product range on Windows."

The advantages are many. Not only does this leave the customer free to 'mix and match' products in the knowledge that there are Microsoft Windows experts in every town and city who can write and modify software, but at the sharp end of operation, the back-office staff can deal with familiar files and databases.

So keen is Almex to ensure operators take advantage of the flexibility of open-architecture software that it is even setting up a user forum, where office managers can not only get advice from Almex experts but can swap ideas and even programming to get the best from the system.

BACK-OFFICE BROUGHT FORWARD

A KEY strategy for Almex has been avoiding the unnecessary installation of new software on operators' systems.

Producing designs for new tickets - perhaps to promote products, carry advertising or contact passengers - has in the past been a graphic designer's job. Almex has changed that by making its Optima IV's tickets editable in HTML and Javascript - for which cheap and even free software is available.

"During trials, we've seen some really professional ticket designs, so we know that operators have the skills to do this," said Mr Aitken.

The 'interface' between the Windows CE.net based ticket machine and the traffic manager's desktop PC is equally simple. Almex has put all its reporting programming on-line, so that operators can do the analysis and program ticket machines via the internet, using nothing more than their internet browser, such

as Netscape or Internet Explorer.

"When most people see this working, they can't believe it's so simple. The screens are easy to understand and reports easy to download," said Mr Aitken. "As Optima IV goes into the market, operators can also use a special user forum on the internet to exchange tips and information, ask questions and, of course, can contact us if they're stuck."

THE FUTURE

Almex is becoming convinced that the future is a ticket machine which also provides vehicle tracking, could monitor driving habits, and even monitor the engine performance through modern multiplexing, then report back automatically via the wireless system already used to download ticket sales information.

"I can even foresee a time when CCTV footage will be kept on the ticket machine. It demands a lot of memory, but it's possible," said Mr Aitken.

THIRD-GENERATION OPTIMA

THE familiar Almex Optima is now the almex-optima and gets much more than just a new name when it is launched in September.

The amazingly flexible electronic ticket machine has at its core standard hardware technologies and, running Windows CE.net operating system, offers the operator almost complete flexibility. Linked with an all-new back-office data management system, it can manage ticketing, drivers and even help manage vehicles.

Among its features are:

- Windows CE-net operating system
- Web-based reporting - no new programmes to install
- Tickets editable in HTML/Javascript - standard products
- Standard internal hardware modules including CompactFlash memory
 - Quick-fit base
 - Wireless LAN data transmission
 - ITS0 compliant



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LINCOLNSHIRE ROADCAR CONTINUES UPGRADE

STEADY investment in new vehicles continues at Lincolnshire RoadCar - with the delivery of seven new Volvo buses in preparation for a busy summer season.

Six of the vehicles are Wrightbus Eclipse/Volvo B7RLEs while the seventh is a B7TL.

The East Lancs Vyking B7TL double decker seats 77 and is already familiar to RoadCar, the company having taken six at the end of last year. It will operate on Lincolnshire County Council's InterConnect service from Skegness to Boston.

The single-deck Wrightbus Eclipse B7RLEs seat 44 and mark a new departure for the company, being used in Skegness as part of its summer season fleet on a number of coastal routes.

Managing director Paul Hill (below) said: "During the summer months we operate a number of scheduled services to holiday destinations along the coast, includ-

ing Skegness and Mablethorpe. They are popular and very busy so reliability was a key factor in our decision to opt for Volvo.

"We had not tried the B7RLE before but were struck by its impressive appearance. In addition, the single-deck, lowfloor design is ideal for this service. Not only do we have a large number of holidaying families with buggies but the resident population consists of a high proportion of retired people, so accessibility is crucial. The vehicles are already in service and we have been delighted with their performance to date.

"The livery has been revamped and as it's gone into operation in Skegness heads are turning and that's good. We have very good business in Skegness but we are in competition with two other operators on a very busy corridor. The season in Skegness is now much extended, running from mid February until new year and we're

anxious to maintain our position as the leading operator in the area providing a very good standard of service and our fleet in Skegness is now over 70% lowfloor and certainly for the summer season where we run a five-minute headway in peak season which has already started - that's 12 buses an hour and nine are lowfloor and three are open-top, so we've got the niches at either end of the market and the competitors are somewhere in between."

The B7RLEs are equipped with 44 seats and offer a wide gangway, lowfloor easy access and independent suspension for improved passenger and driver comfort.

Mr Hill told *CBW*: "We already had 16 Vyking deckers and the current one was part of an order for four which was advanced - we shall get the other three later on in the year - but the need arose for an additional decker for a scheme we put in for last year. They all operate on flagship Interconnect corridors which are Quality Partnerships with Lincolnshire County Council."



FACTFILE	
CHASSIS/ENGINE:	VOLVO B7RLE/B7TL
BODY:	Wrightbus Eclipse/East Lancs Vyking
TRANSMISSION:	ZF-Ecomat
SEATS:	44, 77
SPEC:	Eclipse, lowfloor, wide gangway; B7TL

SUNSUNDEGUI TURN HEADS FOR COMPASS ROYSTON

A PAIR of Volvo B12B Sunsundegui Sideral coaches have joined the 60-strong Compass Royston fleet - marking a new chapter in the company's own-branded tours.

The Durham-based coach firm undertakes regular work for a number of leading tour operators but was keen to show that coaches carrying its own name could be just as stylish and luxurious as those operating its customers' livery.

Both coaches feature the 420bhp Volvo 12-litre DH12 engine and Volvo 12-speed gearbox with I-Shift. They are equipped with 49

reclining seats, air conditioning, TV/DVD player, toilet, and hot and cold drinks facilities.

"We're very proud of the work we undertake for tour operators but we have also been working to build up our direct customer base and thought it was important that our own coaches had an equally high-quality feel," said MD Gary Walton.

"We hadn't bought Volvo for a couple of years but we looked at the B12B and were impressed by its stylish appearance and high specification."



FACTFILE	
CHASSIS/ENGINE:	Volvo B12B
BODY:	Sunsundegui
TRANSMISSION:	I-Shift
SEATS:	49
SPEC:	Air-con, TV/DVD player, hot and cold drinks facility, WC

OTHER DELIVERIES

Bova for Ellison's

MOSELEY (PCV) Ltd, of Pontefract, has supplied a Bova FHD 13.340XE integral 13m coach to Gavin Murray Ltd, T/A Ellison's Coaches. Ellison's specialises in coaches for top football clubs and corporate work and was featured recently in a *CBW* Profile (*CBW*, May 12). Specification of the Bova includes ZF 5HP600 automatic gearbox including hand control to retarder, offside centre sunken demountable toilet, 53/57 luxury reclining passenger seats, air con, Webasto pre-heater, ASR traction control, water boiler and fridge, and radio/PA/CD/DVD.



Pulham & Sons

PULHAM & SONS (Coaches) Ltd of Bourton-on-the-Water has been supplied with a new Volvo B12M Van Hool Alizée T9 Alicron 12m coach by Moseley (PCV). The vehicle has been signwritten to commemorate its 125th year in business and specification includes alloy wheels, 49/53 recliners with leather inlay to headrests and leather piping to moquette seams, demountable sunken washroom, Suttrak air conditioning, drinks facility/fridge, DVD, colour reversing camera system, and TUV Tempo 100 certification.



Moseley (PCV) Ltd has also supplied a Sitcar Beluga midicoach to:

Carriageways

MRS DA COOPER, T/A Carriageways, of Landbeach Cambridge has taken delivery of a Mercedes-Benz 0815 DT Sitcar Beluga 2. Spec includes 152bhp engine, 5s-42 gearbox, Telma CC80 retarder, rear air suspension, 29 recliners with leather headrest inserts, leather piping and three-point seatbelts, double-glazed tinted side windows with curtains, combined water boiler/fridge, air con, electro-pneumatic plug-type passenger entrance door, and radio/PA/CD and DVD.



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BIG FAN OF THE HOT WEATHER



FLETTNER'S roof ventilators may make a low-cost alternative to retrofitted air conditioning, drawing away the hottest air in the vehicle to help make the forced-air ventilation more effective.

The ventilators require no electrical connection and can be fitted to most PSVs. The makers say they will last the lifetime of the vehicle. Performance depends on the model. Flettner says its TCX-2 expels 37 cubic feet of air every minute from the saloon.

An additional benefit claimed is that, by improving ventilation, Flettner ventilators reduce condensation during colder weather.



Find out more on these pages, or log on to

www.flettner.co.uk



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WHAT'S NEW

ERA RELEASES HIDDEN PROFITS

RELEASING hidden profits is the aim of Expense Reduction Analysts (ERA), who act as an independent purchaser of services and supplies with an influence on annual spend of over £350m.

In 2002 ERA contacted Albatross Travel group and proposed a cost management scheme to identify and implement cost savings not already instigated by the company. ERA charged no upfront fee and worked on a

percentage of the savings they delivered. Albatross has confirmed ERA's involvement led to 21% savings on office stationery, 33% savings on printing, 18% savings on mobile phone charges, 56% savings on office drinking water, 15% savings on insurance and 14% savings on landline telephones/fax costs.

Albatross said: "Over the last few years we have been so impressed by the service provided by ERA that we have

now decided to enter a formal alliance with to bring the risk-free services they offer to our coach operator clients."

Johnson's Coaches of Henley-in-Arden has also become a client of ERA. Director Peter Johnson said: "The results they have achieved for us to date have been very encouraging."

■ Contact Marc Page on 01732 321171, e-mail m.page@erauk.net or website www.erauk.net

NEW MICROPHONES FOR COACH AUDIO

COACH audio/video specialist Autosound Ltd has added two new microphones to its extensive product range.

The latest hand and gooseneck microphones are suitable for use with all in coach audio systems including Blaupunkt, Radiomobile and Videobus.

Priced at £56 + VAT for the hand microphone and £69 + vat for the gooseneck microphone they are being launched alongside a special offer promotion which runs until the end of July - where customers can buy two and get one free on either of the microphone models.

■ Details on 01274 688990.



LVD PROTECTS BATTERIES

HIGH POWER usage through on-board auxiliaries can deplete batteries to the point where there is insufficient power to restart the engine.

To protect against this possibility, Banner Batteries is marketing the compact Midtronic LVD system, which prevents battery power falling below a level required to provide a re-start.

The unit is unobtrusive and easy to install. It can be programmed to monitor any of the units aboard that drain power and if battery power falls below 21.8 volts it emits an audible warning. If no action is taken to rectify the drain, the LVD unit automatically shuts down all the programmed units.

■ Details from Banner Batteries on 01889 571100, fax 01889 577342, e-mail office.bgb@bannerbatteries.com



ROSCO POSTER

ROSCO - the Road Operators' Safety Council - has produced a road safety related poster.

Celebrating its golden jubilee this year, ROSCO has found bus operators keen to display its posters on staff noticeboards to highlight safety features or good working practices. Previous posters have included themes to highlight the need for on-going training, alerting drivers to bridge-bashing accidents, speed limit compliance and obscured visibility.

The latest issue relates to driver attitude - a topic recurrent in recent ROSCO Workshop evaluation feedback forms. Entitled *Safety starts with you!* it aims to reinforce a driver's need to take responsibility for his/her attitude and show how that attitude could affect the potential for accidents.

■ Details from Tony Beetham on 01865 775552.

NEWS IN BRIEF

ARC Training re-brands

TRANSPORT industry training specialist ARC Training, part of Accrington & Rossendale College, has re-branded itself in-line with a wider remit to provide training and competence programmes for those involved in all areas of land transport. Now entitled Land Transport Academy (LTA), the organisation believes its name encapsulates its future vision of providing a broader spectrum of training packages.

■ Details from Alan Anderton or Ian Emmott, LTA, Hurstdale House, Hurst Lane, Rawtenstall, Lancs, BB4 7SH, tel 01254 354433, fax 01254 354425 or e-mail lta@across.ac.uk

Eminox deal

EMINOX, the Gainsborough-based stainless steel exhaust and emissions control specialist, is introducing a range of Fuel Borne Catalysts (FBCs) following an exclusive partnership deal with Octel Corporation. The arrangement allows Eminox to continue using the Octel Octimax name and the right to other product names. It will mean it can fit emission control systems to a wider range of vehicles and it provides potential to grow market share in the light duty commercial vehicle sector. The products are complementary to the Eminox CRT and SCRT systems are suited to heavy-duty diesel engines with exhausts reaching high temperatures.

■ Details from Eminox on 01427 816813.

Imex indicator stalks

AUTOMOTIVE parts distributor Imex has begun stocking a range of indicator and light switch stalks to cover all popular applications.

The range is a new addition for Imex, which concentrates mainly on VW and MAN parts plus bumpers and mouldings for light, medium and heavy commercials. Imex boasts a free, same-day delivery service across the north of England, central Scotland and the Midlands. All components are covered under a 12-month, unlimited warranty. Contact Imex on LO-CALL 0845 60 50 404 404.

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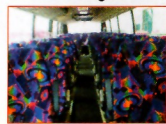
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- To Apply -

Please send your CV with a covering letter by email to reach mike@beaumont-travel.com no later than **Wednesday 29th June**. It is anticipated that interviews will take place during the week of 4th July.

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For informal enquiries, please contact David Lee, PTU Manager on 0121 569 5757 or John Hawkins, Transportation Planning Manager on 0121 569 4221.

We particularly welcome applications from women, people from ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, as they are under-represented within this area of work. Consideration will also be given to job share arrangements.

This post is not open to workers who would require a work permit to work in the UK.

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COACH AND BUS WEEK

EXTRA

LONDON CLAIMS ARE FALLING DOWN

AVOCIFEROUS group calling itself the London Assembly Conservatives has begun a Tatchell-esque assault on Red Ken's Transport for London.

Over the past few weeks, the Tory campaign has attacked the Congestion Charge, plans for pedestrianisation, a bridge closure, Crossrail, and Tube closures, and alleged fraud.

Its latest campaign complains that TfL spends £400,000 on mineral water each year: "TfL - literally flushing fare revenue down the toilet" says the headline. "What's wrong with London tap water?" they ask - a question I hope is rhetorical since an answer would take up a page on its own.

The problem with London Assembly Conservatives is that they are so keen to go into print, they sometimes let standards slip. For example, they recently said the proposal to pedestrianise the A1 from Archway to Angel would cause congestion and pollution on "adjoining roads."

The gaffe I most enjoyed, though, was a re-run of the mistake made by an American millionaire who thought he was buying one of London's best-loved landmarks. In a whinge, the Tories claimed London Bridge couldn't be opened due to a technical fault. The original is, of course, in Arizona and the other one doesn't open. A hasty correction to 'Tower Bridge' came an hour later but somehow failed to lose the impression that they know less about London's transport problems than they claim...

2 MINUTE INTERVIEW

CBW puts someone on the spot and asks "What do you think?"

What shape is the coach and bus industry in?

Over regulated and getting worse and still a political football.

What annoys you most?

As an industry it will not speak out for itself and does not support anyone who attempts to.

What is its greatest asset?

People. Hard working, efficient, loyal but not recognised.

What was the smartest move you ever made?

Buying 1,800 DMS Daimler Fleetlines from London Transport in 1980-84.

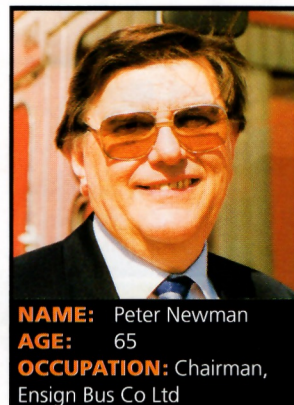
And the biggest mistake?

Not buying an NBC bus company when I could.

Which car would you like?

Not bothered.

Who, would you like to



NAME: Peter Newman
AGE: 65
OCCUPATION: Chairman, Ensign Bus Co Ltd

have as passengers on a long journey?

The entire EU Commission on a single journey to the middle of the Sahara Desert.

What's your favourite hobby?

It has to be - buses!!

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